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SUBJECT: GHANAIAN WOMEN - 50 YEARS OF PROGRESS BUT A LONG WAY TO GO

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Representing more than half the population, Ghanaian women have contributed substantially to Ghana's development since independence. Aside from their critical role in Ghana's economy, women participate in the public sphere, taking on leading positions in politics and civil society. However, various obstacles impede women's full contribution to Ghana's development: exclusion from national processes, under-representation in public life and decision-making, and limited access to economic assets. To fully achieve the substantial returns in investing in women will require Ghana to develop and implement a sustained approach to eliminating gender inequalities. END SUMMARY.

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT WOMEN IN POLITICS

12. (SBU) Ghana's ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and regional diversity means that women's position and status vary significantly depending on their community. However, on the whole, the number of women in high-level political positions has historically been low. In 1966, ten women were appointed to Parliament by President Kwame Nkrumah, although a coup d'etat prevented them from serving their terms. From 1972 to 1974, two of the 140 members of Parliament were women and in 1979-1981 a total of five women were elected to Parliament. Furthermore, only one woman has ever run for vice president in 1996 and there have been no female presidential candidates. Women have not held top positions in the nation's main political parties and traditionally have been poorly represented in male-dominated professions such as science and law.

WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT TODAY

13. (SBU) Recently, Ghanaian women have made strides in the public sector. In addition to holding several high-level positions as ministers and deputy ministers, women serve as district assembly members and judges. The first female director of Ghana Immigration Services, Elizabeth Adjei, was appointed in 2002. In 2007, Georgina Wood was appointed the first female Chief Justice, assuming the fourth highest position in Ghana's state hierarchy. Other women in leading positions include the Acting Commissioner of CHRAJ, Anna Bossman, and the Deputy Inspector-General of the Police, Elizabeth Mills-Robertson.

14. (SBU) Despite some progress in the public sector, activists feel that the presence of women remains limited and, according to Angela Dwamena-Aboagye, still has an air of "tokenism". While representation of women in Parliament has increased from 0% at independence in 1957 to 11% in 2007, the current number of women in Parliament is only 25 of 230 seats. Activists argue that this number remains unacceptably low and note that only few women hold top political positions in Ghana.

15. (U) In Ghana's current government, there are only three women out of 24 members of the Council of State, the body which advises the President, ministers and Parliament on the performance of their duties. Only seven out of 28 ministers are women, and there are only three female members of the cabinet and 12 deputy ministers. Furthermore, only about 10% of the district chief executives, the

highest-level official with administrative and executive responsibilities at the district level, are women. Ghanaian women's rights activists contend that the patriarchal nature of Ghanaian politics, lack of financial resources, and stereotypes of women as weak leaders, make it challenging for a female candidate to launch a successful campaign.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS IN ECONOMY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

¶6. (SBU) Notwithstanding Ghanaian women's limited presence in politics, they continue to be critical players in Ghana's informal economy. Women are indispensable to the three sectors that account for most of Ghana's gross domestic product (GDP): agriculture, industry, and services. In addition to being key actors in Ghana's food production, women have traditionally dominated the nursing, teaching and secretarial fields. In recent times, they have entered into professions historically dominated by men, including law, medicine, and engineering. [NOTE: Women's role in Ghana's economic development will be reported septel. END NOTE]

¶7. (SBU) Ghanaian women have also become influential civil society leaders, heading many non-governmental organizations and serving as advocates for women's and children's rights and welfare. The Regional Coordinator of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Nana Oye Lithur, demonstrated leadership in pushing for a controversial marital rape clause in Ghana's domestic violence legislation, which specifically makes marital rape illegal. Ms. Lithur also helped to establish the Police Service's Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in 1998.

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S NEEDS

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¶8. (SBU) In addition, Ghana has witnessed several recent institutional and legal developments that are focused on women's concerns and needs. In 2006, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, itself headed by a female Cabinet Minister, launched a 400,000 Ghana Cedi (USD 425,000) fund to support campaigning and other activities of women in local governance. After many years of pressuring lawmakers, gender activists succeeded in having the Domestic Violence Act passed in 2007, a key instrument which supplements existing legal protections enjoyed by women. In addition, gender desk officers have been established in most ministries, government departments and agencies as well as in the 138 district assemblies.

FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED

¶9. (SBU) Overall, female activists believe progress has been slow and limited, and contend that gender equality is not broadly accepted as a development priority in the country. By working primarily in the informal sector (particularly the lower echelons), women are victims of highly unstable remuneration, low returns and lack of social security benefits. As a result, many Ghanaian women continue to live in poverty and other vulnerable conditions. Furthermore, many potentially successful female entrepreneurs continue to be constrained by cultural, economic and educational barriers.

¶10. (SBU) Moreover, the progress made in developing institutions and laws that protect women's and children's rights has been hampered by a lack of resources and ineffective implementation. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, like other entities focused on women's issues, suffers from insufficient financial and human resources. While the government adopted an Affirmative Action Policy in 1998 mandating a 40% quota for women's representation in all government bodies, this has not yet been achieved.

¶11. (SBU) Finally, stereotypes and tradition at home relegate many women to customary roles with limited decision making power and resources. According to Jane Quaye, women's social obligations as caretakers significantly restrict their time and freedom outside of

home. Harmful traditional practices such as early forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and gender based violence also perpetuate women's subordinate status. In short, women's rights activists agree that Ghana has "a long way to go."

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR GHANA

¶12. (SBU) COMMENT: Despite the progress Ghanaian women have made in many areas, continuing gender inequalities have a negative impact on Ghana's development. In the words of Nana Oye Lithur, the role of women in Ghana's development "is improving but has been very, very slow and needs to be jumpstarted." To overcome the challenges will require policies that proactively empower women to participate in the economy and politics. This will also require socio-cultural changes to give women equal decision-making power within traditional communities, the public sphere, and at home. END COMMENT

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